

Amendments to the Claim:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1-10 (cancelled).

11 (previously presented). A lactic acid bacterium which is selected from the group consisting of *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* strain DN221 deposited under the accession No. DSM 11034, a strain having all of the characteristics of DSM 11034, *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* biovar *diacetylactis* strain DN227 deposited under the accession No. DSM 11040 and a strain having all of the characteristics of DSM 11040.

12-26 (cancelled).

27 (currently amended). A lactic acid bacterial starter culture composition comprising a lactic acid bacterium of claim ~~6~~ 11.

28-34 (cancelled).

35 (currently amended). A pyruvate formate-lyase (Pfl) defective lactic acid bacterium which is

(I) *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* strain DN221 deposited under the accession number DSM 11034,

(II) *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* strain DN227 deposited under the accession number DSM 11040,

(III) a *Lactococcus lactis* mutant obtained by mutation of strain DN221, or

(IV) a mutant obtained by mutation of strain DN227, said bacterium having, relative to the wild-type strain from which it is derived, at least one of the following characteristics:

(i) essentially the same growth rate when cultivated under aerobic conditions in M17 medium,

(ii) a reduced growth rate or a reduced rate of acid production when cultivated under anaerobic conditions in M17 medium or in reconstituted skim milk (RSM),

(iii) essentially no production of formate under the anaerobic conditions of (ii),

(iv) a reduced production of ethanol or acetate under anaerobic conditions in M17 medium or in reconstituted skim milk (RSM) and/or

(v) an increased production of at least one  $\alpha$ -acetolactate-derived metabolite when cultivated under anaerobic conditions in RSM,

wherein said mutant of (III) ~~of~~ or (IV) is Pfl defective but not also Ldl-defective.

36 (previously presented). The lactic acid bacterium of claim 35 wherein the mutants (III) and (IV) are derived from (I) and (II), respectively, solely by one or more spontaneous, chemically-induced, and/or ultraviolet light-induced mutations.

37 (previously presented). The lactic acid bacterium of claim 35 which is (I) or (II).

38 (cancelled).

39 (previously presented). The bacterium of claim 11 which is strain DN221 (DSM 11034) or a strain having all the characteristics of DSM11034.

40 (previously presented). The bacterium of claim 11 which is strain DN227 (DSM 11040) or a strain having all the characteristics of DSM11034.

41 (new). A method of obtaining a mutant lactic acid bacterium which is a *Lactococcus lactis*, said mutant being obtained by mutation of *Lactococcus lactis* strain DN221 (DSM11034) or strain DN227 (DSM11040), said bacterium having,

relative to the wild-type strain from which it is derived, at least one of the following characteristics:

(i) essentially the same growth rate when cultivated under aerobic conditions in M17 medium,

(ii) a reduced growth rate or a reduced rate of acid production when cultivated under anaerobic conditions in M17 medium or in reconstituted skim milk (RSM),

(iii) essentially no production of formate under the anaerobic conditions of (ii),

(iv) a reduced production of ethanol or acetate under anaerobic conditions in M17 medium or in reconstituted skim milk (RMS) and/or

(v) an increased production of at least one  $\alpha$ -acetolactate-derived metabolite when cultivated under anaerobic conditions in RS.

42 (new). The method of claim 41 wherein the mutant is obtained solely by one or more spontaneous, chemically induced, or ultraviolet light-induced mutations of DN221 or DN227.

43 (new). The method of claim 41 wherein the mutant is obtained solely by one or more spontaneous, chemically induced, or ultraviolet light-induced mutations of DN221.

44 (new). The method of claim 41 wherein the mutant is obtained solely by one or more spontaneous, chemically induced, or ultraviolet light-induced mutations of DN227.

45 (new). A method of obtaining a mutant lactic acid bacterium which is capable of anaerobic growth, which comprises

(a) providing a lactic acid bacterium which is Pfl and Ldh defective, and not capable of growing under anaerobic

conditions in the presence of acetate, and

- (b) mutating said bacterium to obtain one which is capable of anaerobic growth.

46 (new). The method of claim 45 in which the mutant resulting from (b) is Ldh defective but has wild-type Pfl activity.

47 (new). A lactic acid bacterium which is *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* strain DN225, deposited under the accession number DSM11038, or a strain having all of the characteristics of DSM 11038.